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Hidden in plain sight

On copiousness in the *Kunstkammer* of Emperor Rudolf II

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The Kunstkammer *of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (1552–1612) in Prague was one of early modern Europe's most famed princely collections. Part of this renown stemmed from the collection's abundance of rare, exotic, costly and artfully produced objects. However, Rudolf's* Kunstkammer *not only contained copious numbers of diverse objects, it also housed many objects that took copiousness (that is, sexual fertility and seasonal productivity) as their subject. This essay considers how copiousness affected the use of Rudolf's collection. In the end, it reveals that copiousness complicated and made difficult the use of Rudolf's collection on both a practical and an interpretative level.*

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The sixteenth century was a period of prolific activity in both the theory and the practice of collecting in Europe. Stimulated by a booming economy, a thriving art market and expanded global trade, the urge to collect accelerated as the century proceeded. The desire manifested itself in the establishment of princely, academic, ecclesiastical and mercantile collections, and it translated itself into a rush of treatises, inventories, accounts and letters that took collecting as their central concern. At the same time, preoccupations with what and how much to collect, as well as how to order and display the contents of collections, erupted not just in the discourse on collecting but also within the collections themselves. This double characteristic of sixteenth-century collecting – copiousness and self-consciousness – is prominent in the imperial collection, or *Kunstkammer*, of Emperor Rudolf II (1552–1612). In fact, copiousness became a theme of the imperial collection both explicitly and implicitly, whether in the practicalities of the storage and display of objects, or in their meaning. As such, Rudolf's collection affords us an opportunity to examine how such a theme affected the use of the collection. This article shows that the desire for copious objects and objects that represented copiousness (in two senses – sexual fertility and seasonal productivity) posed practical and intellectual challenges to the use of the imperial *Kunstkammer*. More specifically, it reveals that objects were hidden in plain sight in Rudolf's collection. In many cases, actual objects that were housed in the collection were not easily seen or physically encountered, and in other instances the functions or meanings of particular objects were masked. Accordingly, the use of Rudolf's collection depended on access – both physical access to objects and intellectual access to the objects' thickly veiled functions and significance.[1]

It must be emphasized at this point that the treatment of this topic here is highly selective and not designed as a historical survey of the imperial collection during the reign of Rudolf. Certain questions and objects have been given pride of place in an effort to demonstrate that the theme of the collection posed impediments to its use. Following a discussion of the inventory of the collection, I take up the first obstacle to use: the conditions of viewing in Rudolf's *Kunstkammer*. As will become clear, the sheer proliferation of objects presented an individual in the collection with a conundrum: they could see so many things that they could not see. I then turn my attention to two objects whose function and meaning, as with many of the actual objects that comprised the collection, were hidden in plain sight. The first is a vessel that possessed obscure occult properties. The second is one of Rudolf's paintings. It is a famous painting that flaunted its esoteric significance.

A cornucopian collection

Rudolf's *Kunstkammer* was established in 1583, when the emperor left Vienna and moved the imperial court to Prague. In the city on the Vltava, Rudolf renovated

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the medieval Hradčany palace to house his family, his entourage and his collection. Accommodated in premises built over the imperial stable, the collection contained over 10,000 objects dispersed through five chambers.[2] The first inventory of the collection, compiled between 1607 and 1611 by the German antiquary and painter Daniel Fröschl (1563–1613), and numbering 415 folios with 2,814 entries (many of which describe multiple objects), accounts for only two of the five chambers.[3] From the inventory's entries, we gain an impression, at a textual remove, of the makeup of the collection: unicorn horns, vessels crafted from tortoise shells and mounted in gold, cases and game boards inlaid with mother of pearl from Gujarat, Indo-Portuguese aspersoriums, woven baskets, wax paintings, dried plants and seeds, Turkish shoes, Mixtec feather paintings, automata, Florentine *pietra dura* tables and plaques, hunting trophies, tableaux made from coral, tableaux made from unworked minerals or *Handstein*, sea shells, portraits of European nobles and clergy, the bones of giants, an organ from Siam, suits of armour, loads of Chinese porcelain, antique coins, silver fountains, small and large bronzes, astrolabes, pagan idols, quadrants, sextants, clocks, ivory fans and medieval reliquaries.[4]

As I have written elsewhere, early modern inventories, although they appear to be lucid and straightforward lists, are actually very tricky documents to work with when attempting to understand the makeup, organization and appearance of an early modern collection.[5] Compilers of these documents had little interest in organizing a fluent or detailed description of the contents of a given collection. Moreover, with regard to Rudolf's *Kunstkammer*, the 1607–11 inventory is not a record of the arrangement or hang of the *Kunstkammer*. In other words, it gives little to no indication of where exactly all these things were situated in the space. Conceivably, Fröschl was attempting to create categories in the inventory that were not present or evident in the physical organization of the collection. So, although the inventory has headings such as 'Crabs, Starfish and Sea urchins', 'Vessels of Mother-of-pearl', 'Indian paintings on paper', 'Papal, Imperial and Antique swords', 'Musical Instruments', 'Egyptian Vases' and 'Crystal Spoons', and was organized according to some logic that can be discerned, the material collection itself was probably not arranged according to a discernible systematic taxonomy. This surely had to do with the practicalities of the acquisition, storage and display of such a quantity and diversity of objects over time, as well as with the difficulty of placing under tidy categorical rubrics the most desirable objects, such as those that mingled art and nature.[6]

Therefore, it is safe to say that we know enough to know what we do not know about the organization and categorization of these objects in the space of the *Kusntkammer*. We are, though, certain about the placement of several objects in the collection. For instance, some items, such as pieces of Chinese porcelain, were stored on shelves that were open to view.[7] We know that Leoni Leone's bust of Charles V stood on a table across from Adrian de Fries's bust of Rudolf.[8] And we know that astrolabes and other scientific instruments were placed on a long green table in the middle of the main chamber, along with an automaton of a peacock that could squawk, walk and fan a tail made of actual peacock feathers.[9]

Now lost, this animated mechanical bird was a conventional symbol in an unconventional space. In the context of the Habsburg imperial collection, the peacock had a number of associations. Foremost of these was that the peacock, like the imperial eagle, was an emblem, a *Wappentier*, of the House of Habsburg. But whereas the eagle was associated with military strength, the peacock denoted the empire's splendour. This element of the bird's identity reaches back to the biblical book of Kings, which tells us that the peacock was among the riches brought back by Solomon's navy from the distant land of Tarshish (1 Kings 10:22). Pliny commented on the bird's pride in its own beauty, and Augustine marvelled at the incorruptibility of the bird's flesh.[10] But, in addition to wealth, vanity and its quasi-saintly qualities, the peacock, with jewel-like eyes on its plumage, was associated with the sense of sight. For according to Ovid, after Zeus ordered that the giant Argus be slain, Hera set the giant's one hundred eyes on the peacock's tail,.[11] The medieval bestiary tradition played on this pagan past when it construed the eyes on the peacock's plumage to be stand-ins for the all-seeing eye of God. Consequently, the clockwork peacock's fanned and iridescent feathers, at the heart of Rudolf's *Kunstkammer*, make a statement about the visual experience of the collection. It keys the visitor in to the fact that things are not as they appear.[12] For God's eye sees all – even those things that are disguised or hidden to mere mortals.[13]

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But before one could experience the peacock and its message, one had to gain entry to the collection. Access to the *Kunstkammer* was severely limited – to other rulers, representatives of other rulers, and to artists and intellectuals in the employ of the imperial crown. In the case of foreign dignitaries, it seems that Rudolf granted entry to political allies only as a gesture of reciprocity. In September 1601 Piero Duodo, the Venetian ambassador, was permitted to visit the *Kunstkammer* after congratulating the emperor on a recent victory over the army of Sultan Mehmed (1566–1603) in the Battle of Guruslau in present-day Hungary.[14] The Elector of Saxony, Christian II (1583–1611), and his brother Johann Georg (1585–1656) had three audiences with the emperor himself in the *Kunstkammer* in July 1607. The brothers travelled to Prague from Dresden to be rewarded for Saxony's aid in the *Langer Türkenkrieg* (Long Turkish War).[15] Some visitors to the imperial court were not treated with such immediate respect. Carlos Francesco Manfredi, ambassador of the Duke of Savoy, waited over nine months in 1605 to see the possessions of (in Karel van Mander's words) the 'greatest art patron in the world'.[16]

Court artists and various intellectuals summoned by Rudolf to his court moved in and out of the *Kunstkammer* without much ceremony, using the collection as a site for the study of the heavens, the earth and humankind. Anselmus de Boethius de Boodt (1550–1632), Rudolf's physician and keeper of the imperial botanical garden, relied on the *Kunstkammer*'s extensive collection of worked and unworked hardstones while he was producing his pioneering study of minerology, *Gemmarum et lapidum historia* ('The history of gems and stones'), which was dedicated to Rudolf and first published in Hanau in 1609.[17] While de Boodt was preoccupied with material that was generated beneath the earth, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) dedicated his attention to the movement of the heavenly spheres. His *Tabulae Rudolphinae* (1627), which catalogued the stars and charted planetary motion, relied on the hand-crafted scientific instruments by Tycho Brahe (1546–1601) that were stored in the *Kunstkammer*.[18] Court artists depended on the collection for many of their endeavours. Aegidius Sadeler (1570–1629), for instance, based his engraved portrait of Rudolf II (Fig. 1) on an extravagantly allegorical painting (now lost) by Hans von Aachen, which had been housed in the collection.

Fig. 1. Aegidius Sadeler (after Hans von Aachen), portrait of Rudolf II, 1603. Engraving, 33.7 × 25.1 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

However, just because an individual was afforded the opportunity to peruse the collection does not mean that the objects they sought were easy to locate or discern. We know from the 1607–11 inventory that numerous objects were not on view, for they were stored in cabinets or in the drawers of writing desks. For instance, fol. 54 lists forty-eight objects that were kept in a grey writing-desk with sixteen small drawers. The contents include two small agate vases, two small bottles, a spoon carved from carnelian, a large piece of coral, three snail shells, a turned ivory fragment, a Turkish bowl, a piece of crystal carved in China, eighteen bracelets and a Moor's head carved in stone.[19] Unfortunately, the inventory does not indicate which objects were kept in which drawer. Given these examples, and numerous others in the inventory, it is safe to say that there was not a systematic mode of organization for the drawers or cupboards in the *Kunstkammer*.[20]

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Instead it is clear that drawers were arranged arbitrarily and according to convenience. To open a drawer or a cupboard, then, was to give way to relative chaos. An element of anticipation and surprise was built into the experience of exploring the drawers of cabinets and writing-desks in the *Kunstkammer*.

In addition to the challenges of gaining entry to the collection and then acquiring knowledge of the location of the objects in the furniture, other objects were obscured from view because they were stored in cases. Interestingly, though, the 1607–11 inventory rarely mentions the boxes or cases in which objects were stored.[21] Other inventories of the period make a point of describing the containers that protected precious things, such as the 1598 inventory of the ducal *Kunstkammer* in Munich.[22] Here, the compiler, Johannes Fickler, went to great pains to detail the cases belonging to particular objects. Take, for example, this entry: 'a small four-sided container made of black wood and painted in gold'. Inside, Fickler itemizes a ring made of carnelian, a chalcedony ring, a glass head of a bird, half a bird carved from mother-of-pearl, a small animal that looks like a dog, and a small sphere carved from chalcedony.[23] As another example: 'A round box made of red wood with black trim, inside there is a figure of Seneca carved from ivory, with an ivory wreath.'[24] Fickler also tells us that an automaton of a monkey that preached to deer was kept in a case covered with blue velvet and lined with white satin.[25] In all likelihood, a number of the objects crafted from precious materials in Rudolf's collection were housed in containers not unlike those described by Fickler.

It should come as no surprise that many of these cases have not survived the ravages of time.[26] The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam does, however, have a remarkable collection of early modern cases. Take, for instance, a copper case that was crafted to store a sixteenth-century prayer nut attributed to Adam Dircksz. (Adam Theodrici; Figs. 2–3). Or a velvet case manufactured to house an elaborate drinking vessel (no longer in existence). While these two examples are rather modest in appearance, artists would at times design elaborate and allegorically freighted cases for certain objects. Figure 4 shows an engraving by René Boyvin, based on a drawing by Rosso Fiorentino, of two designs of cases for cutlery. With bare-breasted female figures, nude muscular male torsos, animal horns, garlands, drapery and climbing babies, the cases seem to exist independently of the cutlery they were intended to contain. Thus, Boyvin's containers conceal what they were meant to hold, twice over,

Fig. 2. Workshop of Adam Dircksz, prayer nut, *c.*1500–30. Carved boxwood, diameter 4.6 cm. Amsterdam, The Rijksmuseum.

Fig. 3. Workshop of Adam Dircksz, case for the prayer nut (Fig. 2), *c.*1500–30. Copper, diameter 6.5 cm. Amsterdam, The Rijksmuseum.

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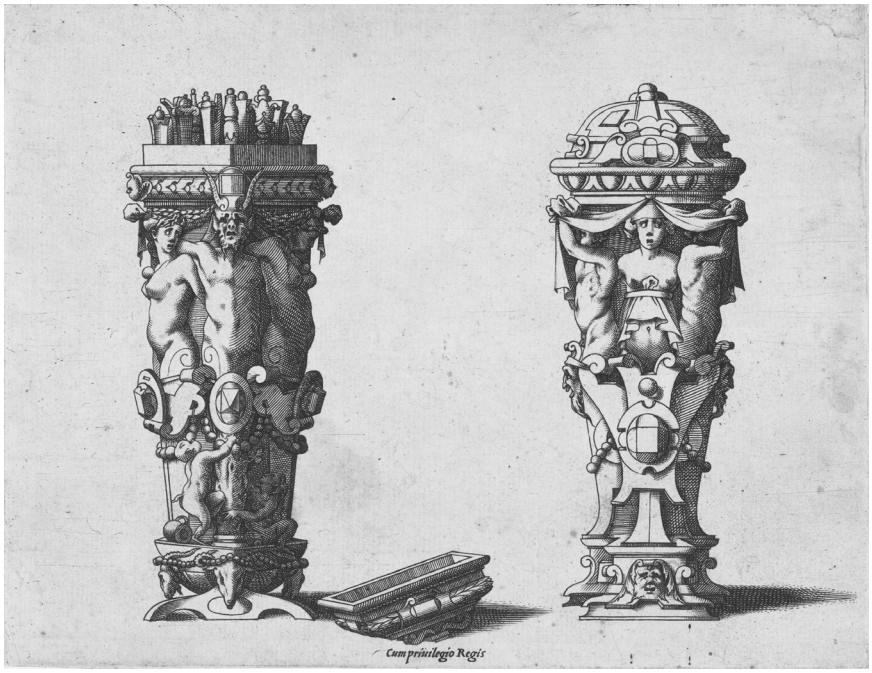

Fig. 4. Renée Boyvin (possibly) after a drawing by Rosso Fiorentino of designs by Léonard Thiry, two carved cases for utensils, *c.*1542–80. Engraving, 14.0 × 17.9 cm. Amsterdam, The Rijksmuseum.

rendering the cutlery more distant, by way of – and this is important – figurations of plenitude.[27]

Perhaps the most famous extant example of a case made for a costly object is, like the others mentioned above, in the Rijksmuseum. It was custom-made for an elaborate silver-gilt table decoration, crafted by the goldsmith Wenzel Jamnitzer of Nuremberg (Fig. 5). It featured a female personification of Earth surrounded by small animals, flowers and other vegetation that had been cast from actual specimens.[28] At this point, it is worth mentioning that Rudolf's *Kunstkammer* contained a silver fountain commissioned by his father, Maximilian II, from Jamnitzer in 1568.[29] It is likely that Jamnitzer provided a case for the fountain, and also possible that the fountain was stored in the imperial *Kunstkammer* in its custom-crafted container (or containers) to protect it from dust, tarnish and unpredictable climatic conditions. The fact that it does not prominently appear in Fröschl's account of the collection stems from the fact that the 1607–11 inventory is not a typical *Nachlass* document (drawn up to account for the movable property of a deceased individual) but rather, as noted above, a textual rendering of the imperial collection that attempted to reorder it according to object type, rather than to record actual placement of the objects in the *Kunstkammer*.[30] This accounts for the protracted compilation of the inventory. All other contemporary German princely collections were inventoried according to the arrangement of objects in the collection and all of them were completed within a year. The first inventory of the Dresden *Kunstkammer* was compiled in 1587; the Ambras inventory was drawn up in 1596; and Munich's collection was set down on paper in 1598.[31]

These forms of display and concealment make it hard to appreciate how the imperial *Kunstkammer* in Prague, which was filled with objects out in the open, stored in cabinets, or protected by custom-made cases, was encountered. What is considered contained versus what is not often lies in the eye of the beholder. Our own ability to walk into a museum gallery and see before us, starkly lit, clean, objects quarantined in transparent glass vitrines with room to breathe, certainly affects how we imagine the experience of early modern princely collections.[32] But the shift from early modern *Kunstkammer* to present-day museum was a substantial one. Much has been written on the categorization of early modern collections and the epistemological changes engendered by early modern collecting;

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Fig. 5. Unknown craftsman, case for a centrepiece made by Wenzel Jamnitzer, 1549. Wood and leather, 109.5 × 53.0 cm. Amsterdam, The Rijksmuseum.

and scholarly attention has been paid to the emergence of certain features of the modern work of art within the courtly collection – for instance, the intimate dialogue between beholder and object, and displays of artistry for artistry's sake, to name just a couple.[33] Far less has been written about specific conditions of locating and then using objects in these collections.[34] Beholding Jamnitzer's fountain after trudging through a swamp of objects; opening the case and removing the highly wrought precious object from it; and setting it down where the eye could take it in would have been an altogether different activity for the few (like de Boodt or Kepler) who were permitted entry, from gliding through the open floors of the *Kunstkammer* galleries as they now appear in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. What is crucial for us to understand is that the sensual engagement with many of the objects in the collection was driven by a combination of touch and sight. Yet much was also obscured and out of reach. The distinguished visitor to the collection was surrounded by a copiousness of objects that were not readily apparent. As a result, the visitor had to actively seek out objects to view, and then engage intimately with them, rather than view them from afar. One might even imagine that the many containers and drawers in the collection promoted the ceremonial removal of objects from their storage or resting places, which in turn contributed to the theatrical spectacle of the collection by way of the object's revelation.

The wealth of sensation afforded the visitor by the collection was born out of the practical circumstances of housing, arranging and protecting such a vast number of diverse objects. It was this material proliferation that communicated copiousness, and which added to the visitor's experience of seeing that many objects were not on view, either on account of the fact that the space was crowded and objects obscured one another or because objects were out of sight in drawers or cases. And the sheer number of objects mattered. If it didn't, why spend so much energy and time documenting and enumerating the objects in the inventory? In one light, Rudolf's *Kunstkammer* might appear to be the outcome of an insatiable desire to acquire more and more things. In another, the collection comes into view as a careful cultivation and presentation of the exuberant diversity of the universe. To be sure, there is an element of truth in both of these views, but to think of the collection as having cornucopian properties, as being a place whose purpose was to capture the flourishing of natural and artificial creation, and that itself fostered the production of objects mingling art and nature is a productive train of thought. The cornucopian metaphor is certainly helpful in coming to terms with the objects and imagery in the collection that flaunted another (though related) type of plentitude, namely sexual fertility. Or, to put it slightly differently, to recognize the cornucopian properties of the physical collection allows us to see how sexual desire and the picturing of sexual desire were deeply bound up in Rudolf's collection and may even have been coextensive with the urge to accumulate so many objects that displayed nature's and culture's generative propensities.

Fruits of the flesh

I want now to turn attention away from the ways in which the copious quantity of objects in the

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collection contributed to the fact that so many objects were hidden from view and towards an object from Rudolf's collection that both figured copiousness and whose function was hidden in plain sight. The object is a carved goblet made from rhinoceros horn featuring a male and two female satyrs that mutate into coral (Fig. 6). Attributed to the ivory carver Nikolaus Pfaff, this object was one of several rhinoceros horn vessels carved by Pfaff, and one of many (mostly of Chinese origin) collected by Rudolf.[35] Such vessels were sought after for their exotic material, display of artisanal finesse, and, notably, their occult properties. When fashioned into drinking vessels (or when it was itself ingested), rhinoceros horn was believed to induce aphrodisiacal effects or provide prophylactic power against poison.

The goblet's wittiness, whimsy and ostentation are the direct result of the artisan's transformation of the horn of an exotic animal. Pfaff exploited the analogy of the form of the horn to shape a vessel by hollowing it out on a lathe, and he exploited the unapparent properties of the material by carving satyrs and coral out of its surface.[36] Carved from the tip of the horn, Pfaff's satyrs are iconographically novel, possessing the hindquarters of a goat, the torso and head of a human, and coral instead of arms. With bodies thrice segmented, these chimerical figures seem to transform from animal, to human, to vegetable, to mineral before our eyes. With his hairy legs and stony arms intertwined with those of the female satyrs, the male satyr's penis expands to accommodate his sexual excitation at this spectrum of touch. Twisting upward, like branches from the trunk of a tree the coral forms a nest for the translucent – amber-like – vessel that transformed the liquid it held into a doubly potent elixir, one that could both heal and arouse.

Fig. 6. Nikolaus Pfaff, goblet of rhinoceros horn, *c.*1608. African white rhinoceros horn, height 29.6 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. KHM-Museumsverband.

It comes as no surprise that coral cradles the liquid that was intended to be transformed: coral itself epitomized metamorphosis in early modern collections.[37] Wenzel Jamnitzer's silver statuette *Daphne*, which was housed and displayed in the electoral *Kunstkammer* in Dresden sprouts coral from her head while turning into a tree after Apollo's amorous pursuit.[38] The two materials out of which she is composed emphasize her momentary monstrous nature, not unlike the arboreal satyrs on Pfaff's goblet, who are also petrified in the midst of their own metamorphosis. Beyond coral's association with mutation, it was considered wondrous as it was believed to be both a plant and a mineral. Coral's penumbral ontology can be traced back to Ovid who, in his retelling of the Perseus myth, claimed that the stony plant was actually seaweed petrified by the blood of the freshly slain Medusa.[39] Both vegetable and mineral, it suits Daphne's hybrid nature – she was after all the daughter of Gaia and Manto (a river god) – and it makes similar sense that we see it bursting from the limbs of the hybrid satyrs on Pfaff's goblet. Indeed, as suggested above, the presence of coral makes the satyrs doubly hybrid. But there was still a further affinity between coral and Pfaff's vessel: both rhinoceros horn and coral were prophylactics, one against poison, the other against the evil eye.[40]

However, unlike coral, which was fished in the Mediterranean off the coasts of present-day Algeria, Tunisia, Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily and Calabria, rhinoceros horn was a thrill from the east.[41] The 1607–11 inventory of Rudolf's *Kunstkammer* refers

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to the animal's origin. Rhinoceros horn vessels not only appear under the category of 'Rhinoceros Horn' ('Renotzerhörner'), but also under 'Horns from Indian Unicorn Donkeys' ('Hörner von Asino Indico'), a name for the beast that can be traced to Pliny's *Natural History*.[42]

Rhinoceros horn vessels in general, and Pfaff's satyr-carved rhinoceros horn goblet in particular, are a testament to the erotic climate at the court of Rudolf II. In a watercolour on vellum, dated 1604, Daniel Fröschl, the author of the 1607–11 inventory, links four fleshy bodies to form a triangular shape on a fleshy surface (Fig. 7). A satyr and a nymph (sometimes identified as Jupiter and Antiope) occupy the centre. Both figures strike energized poses, stretching and twisting their limbs and torsos in movements akin to rape – or, rather, akin to what courtly society imagined rape to be.[43] The exact purpose of the second satyr on the right and the putto on the other side of the couple is left open, though the fact that the putto keeps his eyes on the act while the striding satyr closes his suggests that what is occurring before us is not for all to see. Thus, even though the two figures go beyond narrative necessity, the second satyr and the putto form a visual and conceptual frame for this sexual encounter. Accompanying this play of gazes and bodies in the picture is the basket of fruit atop the standing satyr's head, which, as if from nowhere, is carried into the secluded, barren and craggy setting. This bountiful harvest signals nature's fecundity, a fecundity that seems at once to emanate from the central satyr's erect phallus which he guides into the body of the nymph. Here the penis of the satyr (who is a stand-in for Zeus) becomes an inexhaustible and untamed source of corporeal plenitude. And it is this divine super-body that disguises (or hides) itself in plain sight as a wild beast in order to appear.

Fig. 7. Daniel Fröschl, *Two Satyrs and a Nymph with Putto, possibly Jupiter and Antiope*, 1604. Pen and brown ink with watercolour on vellum, laid down, 12.3 × 10.3 cm. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, William Findlay Watson Bequest 1881.

Painted at around the same time as Pfaff's goblet was carved, Fröschl's *Jupiter and Antiope* is just one of the numerous 'loves of the gods' pictures manufactured at Rudolf's court, which, in their devotion to passion and inducement of pleasure, emphasized sexuality and fertility.[44] It is important that we keep in mind this body of work, in which carnal desire was exaggerated and unchecked, as we return to Pfaff's goblet. It is as if the satyrs' entwined legs and the male satyr's erect penis not only signal the uncontrollable desire of the hybrid creature, but also make evident the libidinal and productive medicinal aspects of the rhinoceros horn which were not otherwise visually apparent.[45] Thus, like so many of the objects in the imperial collection, the function and effects of Pfaff's goblet were hidden in plain sight. And like the objects that were concealed by drawers or cases, Pfaff's goblet posed a challenge to its potential user. But rather than a practical obstacle, it presented an intellectual or, more specifically, an interpretative one, owing to the way the imagery of satyr turning into coral only hinted at the medicinal function of the vessel. Like Pfaff's rhinoceros horn goblet, the final object to be discussed, figures copiousness and pictures something that was concealed, but visible to those who know how to see.

Flesh of the fruits

Perhaps no better example can be found in this collection of an object that posed an intellectual or interpretative challenge than Giuseppe Arcimboldo's portrait of Rudolf II as Vertumnus, the Roman god of the seasons (Fig. 8). Painted in Milan around 1590

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Fig. 8. Guiseppe Arcimboldo, *Vertumnus*, *c.* 1590. Oil on panel. 68 × 56 cm. Bålsta, Sweden, Skokloster Slott.

and probably sent to the imperial court along with several poems by Gregorio Comanini and Giovanni Filippi de' Gherardini in January 1591, this portrait tests the capacity of the imperial image to be represented directly and indirectly.[46] For here the sitter is both himself *ex se*, out of himself, as well as something beyond himself.[47] In his *Vertumnus*, Arcimboldo builds an image of a crowned Rudolf II out of a mélange of freshly harvested flowers, fruits, grains and vegetables representing all the seasons and blended into a mystic harmony. 'This undifferentiated conjunction of seasons', writes Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, 'suggests that they form one undifferentiated season: this is the mark of the Golden Age that has come with the reign of Rudolf. This Holy Roman Emperor is thus shown as the ruler of a new Rome that will enjoy the eternal domination of the world.'[48]

Portraying Rudolf II as a nature divinity, as nature embodied, is a poetic activity. As Barthes wrote of Arcimboldo's imagination, 'It does not create signs, it combines them – deflects them – exactly what a craftsman of language does.'[49] Indeed, *Vertumnus* is an extraordinary example of an artist translating a variety of objects into a convincing human likeness. Bulbous fruits and squashes – a cucumber, a pumpkin, an artichoke, a head of garlic, a turnip – dominate the composition, creating the undulating surface of the figure who emerges from the black ground. Heavily modelled and outlined, each piece of fruit or vegetable becomes a unique object carefully and systemically fitted together. The apples that stand in for Rudolf's cheeks, the wheat for his beard, the peas for his eyebrows, and the berries for his pupils make Arcimboldo's likeness of Rudolf celebratory, because it articulates a very particular oscillatory relationship between the figure represented and nature: an oscillation between the macrocosm and the microcosm that authorizes the power of the emperor. Moreover, all these fruits of the earth, read together, describe an eternal cycle of renewal. Arcimboldo represents the bounty of the world as the emperor and the emperor as the ultimate bounty of the world. Portraiture becomes an allegory hidden in plain sight just as the allegory lightly conceals a portrait of the emperor, to create a fiction of imperial autochthony, and in doing so, masks that his right to rule was one that was bestowed upon him by authorities external to himself, namely the electors of the Holy Roman Empire.

When compared to other portraits of Rudolf, Arcimboldo's rendering of Rudolf, teeming with organic life, reads as if it were a mask.[50] Might it be the other way around, though? Perhaps Arcimboldo's portrait of Rudolf II claims that realistic portraits like those painted by Hans von Aachen conceal the emperor's true nature. If viewed in this light we can begin to see the *Vertumnus* painting as an attempt to show the true sovereign lurking behind the mask. Thus, as with the objects stored in the drawers or in cases in the imperial *Kunstkammer*, to view the sovereign one must remove the covering to peer at what is within. And like Pfaff's goblet, the imagery of copiousness presented a challenge and an opportunity for a visitor to the collection to discern the function of the object. For Pfaff's goblet that function was medicinal. For Arcimboldo's painting the function was political.

How did this concealment of function and meaning affect the use of the collection? One thing is certain, the collection was difficult to use. The objects in the collection were many. It is likely that they were not systematically organized or arranged. Furthermore, many of them were housed in closed drawers or cabinets. It is probable that even when they were not stored inside furniture, objects were obscured from view by their protective cases.

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Thus, upon entering the famed imperial collection the individual who was afforded such privileged access would encounter a host of objects that they could not actually see. The considerable number of objects in the collection, however, was not the only means by which copiousness was conveyed. Objects like Pfaff's rhinoceros horn goblet and Arcimboldo's portrait of Rudolf as Vertumnus figured copiousness – sexual fertility and seasonal productivity respectively. And like the many objects in the collection that were hidden in plain sight, the functions and meanings of the objects that figured copiousness were similarly hidden. However, rather than a practical challenge, these objects posed an interpretative one. In the end, what does all of this teach us about Rudolf's collection? It teaches us that the theme of copiousness in Rudolf's collection shaped how it could be used, and one of those uses lay in trying to solve the puzzle of the relationship between what could be seen and what was hidden.

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